

FEET WASHING

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(Historical excerpts on "feet-washing" among Christians, from writers who lived during the first three centuries of the present dispensation.)

In looking at the question before us, it is but fair that I should copy the following somewhat lengthy quotation from the writings of Augustine, who lived in the fourth century A. D. This author was a voluminous writer, of great missionary zeal. He wrote Homilies and Commentaries on the Gospels and an Exposition of the Psalms. From his works on the Gospel of John, (Post Nicene Fathers Vol. 7, p. 306) I quote as follows: "If I then," says He, "your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you." This, blessed Peter, is what thou didst not know when thou wert not allowing it to be done. This is what He promised to let thee know afterwards, when thy Master, and thy Lord terrified thee into submission, and washed thy feet. We have learned, brethren, humility from the highest; let us, as humbly, do to one another what He, the highest, did in His humility. Great is the commendation we have here of humility: and *brethren do this to one another in turn, even in the visible act itself, (and) when they treat one another with hospitality; for the practice of such humility is generally prevalent, and finds expression in the very deed that makes it discernible. And hence the Apostle, when he would commend the well-deserving widow, says "If she is hospitable, if she has washed the Saint's feet." And wherever such is not the practice among the saints, what they do not with the hand they do in heart, if they are of the number of those who are addressed in the hymn of the blessed three men, the three Hebrew children in Daniel (Apocraphal,) "O ye holy and humble of heart, bless ye the Lord." But it is far better, and beyond all dispute more accordant with the truth, that it should also be done with the hands; nor should the Christian think it beneath him to do what was done by Christ. For when the body is bent at a brother's feet, the feeling of such humility is either awakened in the heart itself, or is strengthened if already present.*

But apart from this moral understanding of the passage, we remember that the way in which we commended to your attention the grandeur of this act of the Lord's, was that in washing the feet of the disciples who were *already washed and clean*, the Lord instituted a sign, to the end that, on account of the human feeling that occupy us on earth, however far we may have advanced in our appreciation of righteousness, we might know that we are not exempt from sin; which

He thereafter washes away by interceding for us, when we pray the Father who is in heaven, to forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors. What connection, then, can such an understanding of the passage have with that which He afterwards gave Himself, when He explained the reason of His act, in the words, "If I then your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you?" Can we say that even a brother may cleanse a brother from the contracted stain of wrongdoing? Yea, verily, we know that of this also we were admonished in the profound significance of this work of the Lord's, that we should confess our faults one to another, and pray one for another, even as Christ also maketh intercession for us. "— And if He forgives us, whom we have nothing to forgive; how much more ought we, who are unable to live here without sin, to forgive one another! For what else does the Lord apparently intimate in the profound significance of this *sacramental sign*, when He says, "For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you;" but what the Apostle declares in the plainest terms, "Forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye?" Let us therefore forgive one another's faults, and pray for one another's faults, and thus in a manner be washing one another's feet. For it is our part, by His grace to be supplying the service of love and humility: it is His to hear us, and to cleanse us from all the pollutions of our sins thro Christ and in Christ; so that what we forgive even others, that is, loose on earth, may be loosed in heaven."

I have made this long quotation from the "Tractate" LVIII, that my readers may get a fair idea of the teaching Augustine draws from the "Sacrament" of Feet-washing. For you will have observed that he calls it a "sacrament" and that he also says the "practice of such humility" i. e. washing feet, was "generally prevalent among the brethren." This is not an argument on the part of the author in support of the ordinance of "feet-washing," but is simply an allusion to it, as being common in his day, and the force of what it stood for; i. e. the forgiveness of each other's faults. You will notice, first, that our author says it was generally practiced in his day, and then proceeds to tell us what it signified in a spiritual sense. He draws such spiritual lessons as a good Bible exegete would draw from it among us. That it was practiced by the most spiritual Christian in the early church, and was regarded as being of sacramental quality, and force, is a proposition that will not be controverted.

Some commentators on the thirteenth

chapter of John, in modern times, try to find excuse for this act of the Savior in washing the disciple's feet, on the plea that it was to cleanse them from the dust of the road, and make ready for the feast, as was common; regardless of the fact that they were already sitting at the table, and the supper was already prepared and that Jesus himself, says that they were already "washed" i. e. bathed. And if it had been but the ordinary act of cleansing the feet after coming off the streets, indeed Peter would not have so much cause for astonishment, and the Savior would not have promised them that he would explain his act afterward. But our author gives no sanction to such opinion, for he says that they were "already washed and clean," and that Jesus "instituted it as a sign."

But it was not my intention in producing these quotations from early history to enter into an elaborate argument in these articles in support of "Feet-washing as an ordinance." For the honest student will see in them, that it was as much of an ordinance, as was the "Feast," spoken of by Pliny, (Of which I will write in future article) or as was the Lord's day services, Baptism, or the Eucharist, (Meal.)

CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP

CHRISTIAN NININGER

A steward is one attending to the interests of another.

In the scriptures we read of the "unjust steward" who was not faithful to his calling and to his employer. Unfaithful stewards are very common in this day and age, both in church and all business affairs of life.

Man is—may I say—most all men are more or less selfish and will not and do not attend to the duties, interests and expectations of others—their employers, their children, their parents, their relations and those who offer their services and pretend to attend to the wishes of others; their friends. This is a sad picture even in the affairs of life, but it is true. There is another picture we may draw which perhaps is more sad, which is not for this life only but reaches into eternity, and this is the stewardship for God.

We are all on the Lord's premises, we are all dependent on him; we have that which he has given us and we cannot do without it. He would have us all serve him and be his stewards, for he has offered great inducements and a grand reward to all who do his biddings. The sad part of it all is we are not good stewards such as the Lord would have us be. Why is it we are not good stewards for the Lord? Selfishness, again as ever comes in and deters us from being what we would be.

Selfishness is a besetment of us all more or less, and this spirit or disposi-